

I/We Claim

1. A method of mail preparation including the steps of:-
 1. processing a first mail item comprising a mail item in a series of mail items;
 2. effecting an accounting operation in respect of a first postage charge for said first mail item; generating a first postage indicium to provide evidence that said accounting operation has been effected in respect of said first postage charge;
 - 10 processing a second mail item comprising a mail item subsequent to said first mail item in said series of mail items; determining if said postage charge remains unused because processing of said first mail item has not been completed;
 - 15 if said first postage is unused determining if said first postage indicium is suitable for use in relation to said second mail item; and if the first postage indicium is suitable for use in relation to said second mail item, generating a substitute postage indicium to provide evidence in relation to said second mail item that said accounting operation has been effected in respect of said first postage charge and if the first postage indicium is not suitable for use in relation to said second mail item, effecting an accounting operation in respect of a second postage charge for said second mail item; and generating a second postage indicium to provide evidence that said accounting operation has been effected in respect of said second postage charge.
 - 30 2. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the substitute postage indicium is generated as a modification of the first postage indicium.
 - 35 3. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein generation of the substitute postage indicium includes providing an indicator in the first postage indicium indicative that the accounting operation for the first postage charge

relates to the second mail item.

4. A method as claimed in claim 3 wherein the postage indicium includes a cryptographic token and the
5 cryptographic token is based in part upon the indicator.

5. A method as claimed in claim 3 wherein the first postage indicium is generated to include a flag in a first state and wherein the substitute indicium is generated
10 with said flag in a second state different from said first state.

6. A method as claimed in claim 5 wherein the postage indicium includes a cryptographic token and the
15 cryptographic token is based in part upon the state of the flag.

7. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein generation of the first postage indicium is based at least in part on
20 recipient address and wherein the step of determining if the first postage indicium is suitable for use in relation to the second mail item includes the step of determining if a recipient address of the second mail item is the same as a recipient address of the first mail item.

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8. A method as claimed in claim 1 including the steps of storing the first indicium and a marker relating to the stored first indicium and the further step of setting said marker if the processing of the first mail item is not
30 completed.

9. A method as claimed in claim 8 including the step of resetting the marker relating to the stored first indicium if the first indicium is determined to be suitable for use
35 in relation to the second mail item.

10. Mail preparation apparatus including:-
accounting means operable to effect an accounting
operation in respect of a first postage charge for a first
mail item of a series of mail items and to generate a
5 first postage indicium to provide evidence that said
accounting operation has been effected in respect of said
first postage charge;
said accounting means being operative in processing a
second mail item comprising a mail item subsequent to said
10 first mail item in said series of mail items to determine
if said postage charge remains unused because processing
of said first mail item has not been completed and
if said first postage is unused to determine if said first
postage indicium is suitable for use in relation to said
15 second mail item; and
if the first postage indicium is suitable for use in
relation to said second mail item, to generate a
substitute postage indicium to provide evidence in
relation to said second mail item that said accounting
20 operation has been effected in respect of said first
postage charge and
if the first postage indicium is not suitable for use in
relation to said second mail item, to effect an accounting
operation in respect of a second postage charge for said
25 second mail item and to generate a second postage indicium
to provide evidence that said accounting operation has
been effected in respect of said second postage charge.